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RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5731  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1001  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1166  
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RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4230  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0156  
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SUBJECT: FARC ANNOUNCES PENDING RELEASE OF THREE HOSTAGES

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.  
Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1.** (C) SUMMARY: The GOC welcomed the December 18 announcement by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) that it would release three hostages - Clara Rojas, her son Emmanuel, and former Congresswoman Consuelo Gonzales de Perdomo - to Venezuelan President Chavez or "whomever he designates," but reiterated its offer of an "encounter zone" for GOC-FARC talks on a humanitarian accord. Senator Piedad Cordoba and President Hugo Chavez praised the FARC's move and vowed continued efforts for a humanitarian exchange. GOC Secretary of the Presidency Bernardo Moreno told us the FARC announcement was a strategic move to put pressure on Uribe to accept a demilitarized zone (*despeje*) for talks and voiced concern that the Cubans may be advising Chavez and the FARC. END SUMMARY.

**¶2.** (U) On December 18, the Secretariat of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) released a communique (dated December 9, the 17th anniversary of the Colombian army's assault on a FARC sanctuary in Casa Verde, Meta), criticizing President Uribe for "slamming the door" on facilitation efforts by Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba. The FARC reiterated its demand for a demilitarized zone in Florida and Pradera municipalities for 45 days to negotiate a humanitarian accord and thanked Chavez for his "dedication and colossal efforts." The FARC said it will free Ingrid Betancourt's 2002 running mate, Clara Rojas, and her son Emmanuel, who was born in captivity, along with former Congresswoman Consuelo Gonzales de Perdomo, to Venezuelan President Chavez or "whomever he designates".

**¶3.** (U) GOC Peace Commissioner Carlos Restrepo welcomed the FARC's commitment to unilaterally release the hostages, and repeated the GOC's willingness to open an "encounter zone" for talks with the FARC. He also urged Chavez to moderate his rhetoric and to show respect for Colombia. Senator Piedad Cordoba said the FARC would have released as many as 25 hostages if

Uribe had not suspended her and President Chavez' efforts to facilitate an exchange. She promised to continue to work to obtain the hostages' freedom despite Uribe's action, noting she had a mandate from the hostages' families. Chavez praised the FARC's act of good faith despite Uribe's recent "brutal decision" to remove him as a facilitator. Chavez said he would not speak to Uribe, but assured FARC leader Manuel Marulanda that he hoped to continue efforts to achieve a humanitarian exchange. He reiterated that Venezuela would never be "blackmailed" into labeling the FARC as terrorists or enemies.

¶14. (C) GOC Secretary of the Presidency Bernardo Moreno told us December 19 that the FARC's release of Rojas, Emmanuel, and Gonzalez was an astute strategic move that would put pressure on Uribe to accept a despeje and the return of Cordoba and Chavez as facilitators. The release of Emmanuel would generate an emotional reaction from the Colombian public, especially at Christmas, and the GOC expects elements of the media--along with Cordoba and some family members--to renew calls for a despeje. Political operator Alvaro Leyva--working with former Presidents Samper and Pastrana--would also try to create a national movement in favor of a despeje.

¶15. (C) Moreno said the GOC is determined to resist this pressure. Uribe will not accept the return of Chavez and Cordoba given their past track record and continuing verbal attacks on the GOC. He also predicted that Uribe would not yield on a despeje. Most Colombians oppose a humanitarian accord involving a despeje, and the GOC plans to mobilize this public

sentiment. (Note: Presidential Communications director Jorge Eastman told us December 17 that a December 7 Casa Narino poll showed 55% of Colombians oppose a despeje even to promote a humanitarian accord.) Agricultural Minister Arias will travel to Pradera and Florida to organize protests against their demilitarization, and GOC officials will publicly stress the long history of failed negotiations with the terrorist group. Moreno said the GOC will also continue to push its "encounter zone" initiative as a reasonable alternative to a despeje.

¶16. (C) Moreno voiced concern that the Cubans may be advising Chavez and the FARC on their latest moves, noting that the Cuban Embassy provided the GOC with the FARC communique. He added that the GOC is uncertain how far Chavez will go in cutting bilateral commercial ties. Many Colombian businesses depend heavily on the Venezuelan market, and this will put additional pressure on the GOC. Still, Moreno said the GOC understands the inherent instability of the Venezuelan economy makes it dangerous to depend too heavily on exports to its neighbor. By forcing Colombian business to explore alternative markets, the current commercial tensions could help Colombia in the long run.

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